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ABSTRACT

The situation for physically handicapped college students both in the United States and abroad was studied. Information was obtained from questionnaires sent to colleges in New England, New York, and New Jersey, from personal interviews with schools specializing in education for the deaf, and from interviews with educators in selected foreign countries. A dilemma common to all was found to be shortage of needed funds. Visits were made to Spain, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Barbados, and information was obtained from Puerto Rico, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. Discussions with educators focused upon: (1) What kinds of support services (interpreters, note-takers, tutors, personal care attendants, or transportation) can colleges provide in relation to the various types of student disabilities? (2) What are the costs in human terms and in finances? and (3) How can more awareness and sensitivity be provided for faculty, staff, and non-disabled students so that all feel like participants in the educational process and none feel threatened? The role that educators must play in planning future training programs for teachers is discussed. (JD)

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HANDICAPPED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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HANDICAPPED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The International Year of the Handicapped (1981) seemed like an excellent time to seek answers to the many questions I had as the Section 504 Coordinator for Worcester State College, a small public college in Central Massachusetts. Combining my inclination for travel along with my desire to know what others were doing in the field, I decided to use my sabbatical to discover what was being done to provide services for handicapped students in higher education at both the national and international level.

The purpose of my quest was to gather information rather than to compare educational systems so that I would have more knowledge and understanding of higher education procedures for the physically handicapped. Thus, this paper does not deal with the problems of learning disabled students. Instead, it presents a global perspective of what I perceived to be the situation for physically handicapped students, both here and abroad. Visits were made over a nine-month period to countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain. When personal visits were not possible, questionnaires were sent to about thirty colleges in New England, New York and New Jersey. There was a common theme in many of the responses.

1. All of the colleges contacted provide some type of support services to handicapped students.

2. Several have directors who have no other responsibility.

3. None of the colleges discourage students from pursuing any of the majors, but sometimes the difficulties that can be expected are stressed.

4. Most had some type of budget specifically earmarked for handicapped services.

Questionnaires were not used in foreign countries because for the most part, higher education policies for the handicapped were still in developmental stages.

Worth noting is the fact that American educators were very willing to talk about what their institutions were doing to provide supportive services to the disabled, while educators in foreign countries preferred to discuss the outstanding attributes of their educational systems as a whole rather than to deal with the specific issue of handicapped students. This was as true in Bulgaria as it was in Barbados. The extremely warm reception I received abroad was as astonishing as it was welcome, since some of the educational systems were visited without advanced appointment and in some cases, in spite of severe language barriers.

THE PROBLEMS

Now that the curb cuts are in and special parking spaces have been designated for the handicapped, the administration of many institutions of higher education seem to feel that they have complied with both the spirit and the letter of Section 504 Regulations. There are constant meetings to discuss declining enrollments, dwindling budgets, decaying campus facilities and the need for more

relevant programs, but many campuses are not addressing the issue of supportive services needed by handicapped students.

It may be that the problems created by the presence of this group on campus comes too close on the heels of the problems that needed to be solved and still exist for educationally disadvantaged students or, it could be that the two problems are seen as one. In contrast to educationally disadvantaged students who may all be suffering from a lack of Basic English or Basic Mathematics skills and can often be put in the same type of learning situation as a group, the individual disabilities of handicapped students require individual kinds of service. While both groups of students may need tutors, the deaf student will also need an interpreter and the quadraplegic student may also need a personal care attendant. Blind students or those with neuromuscular problems may need transportation between classes if they are going to keep up with their schedule.

THE DILEMMA

Simply put, the primary cause of the dilemma is money. The structural changes and supportive services needed by handicapped students cost money, a commodity hard to come by in the age of budget slashing at all governmental levels. Federal funds for architectural adjustment are slow in coming and limited. Thus, any college that is housed on an old campus is limited in providing complete access to all programs.

The issue of money for the provision of services is looked at

differently in the United States and abroad. In the United States. legislation mandates equal access which for many campuses, means architectural adjustments which ultimately means money. In Eastern Europe, money is spent to provide training, mostly technical in an isolated setting. In Spain, a Western country, most university buildings are not accessible, but members of the ministry stated that if a handicapped student really wants to go to college, staff and students will provide assistance, for example, by carrying a wheelchair student up the stairs or taking notes in class, if necessary.

At one major private university in Boston, the Coordinator for Handicapped students stated that individual departments provide finances for needed services; that the university has a continuing program for architectural adjustments and that work-study students provide much of the needed assistance.

At a public university in Connecticut, a considerable amount of money has been spent on architectural adjustments of the residence halls. In an effort to keep handicapped students from feeling isolated, the university has arranged the toilet/shower facilities within two of the suites so that both handicapped and non-handicapped students can use them.

In Czechoslovakia, there was a feeling of amazement that handicapped students would want to go to the university there when such great technical/industrial schools existed to prepare students to earn a good living (as piano tuner, for example), the ultimate goal

of all of us whether we go to college or not. It was clear that this country does not believe in mainstreaming any more than the country of which it is a satellite, Russia. However, there were programs at the university level for teachers to learn how to teach the disabled.

The Soviet Union prides itself on the fact that there are no unemployed blind or deaf in the country (Boston Sunday Globe, 11/2/80, p. A64). Russia's Institute of Defectology determines through a screening procedure which special schools students will attend. If students do not want to go to the special schools, they may, according to the Russians, go to regular schools, but will not be provided with any special assistance.

THE VISITS: UNITED STATES

Both Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C., and the National Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, New York are cities unto themselves and leave one awe-struck after a visit. They prepare an itinerary for visitors that gives an excellent overview of the work being done on campus. They also give you enough reading material to last a lifetime.

GALLAUDET

The President of the United States serves as the patron of Gallaudet College. Its employees are bound by the same rules as all other federal employees. The College is the largest four year liberal arts institution for the deaf in the world and now takes students with handicaps other than deafness. There is also a Model

Secondary School for the Deaf and the Kendall Demonstration Elementary School. Students at Gallaudet interact with hearing students by taking a variety of courses through the Consortium of Universitites in the Washington, D.C. area.

NATIONAL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF (NTID)

Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) serves as the host institution for NTID. Integrating the deaf students at NTID with the hearing students at RIT poses somewhat of a problem because instructors at RIT are not required to be proficient in sign language. NTID is a two year school that serves as one segment of the ten colleges of RIT. Hearing and deaf students share housing facilities, athletics and social events. The logistics of planning academic support services for NTID students enrolled in RIT programs make the planners at the Pentagon seem like amateurs in comparison.

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO

The University of Puerto Rico has several programs that are dedicated to the prevention of handicapping conditions. During the International Year of the Handicapped, the Medical Sciences Campus sponsored programs, exhibits and conferences to increase the awareness of the college community and its surroundings to the needs of the handicapped. The Campus was involved in several projects designed to eliminate architectural barriers and provide a braille directory of the campus.

All students on the campus are exposed to educational programs that prepare them to better understand the prevention and management

of handicapping problems. Internships and field experiences are arranged for students in the Schools of Medicine and Dentistry and the Colleges of Health Related Professions and Pharmacy. The entire Medical Sciences Campus, faculty, administrators and students are involved in the endeavors.

THE VISITS: ABROAD

For the most part, the word "handicapped" in foreign countries means mentally retarded. Governments feel that they have a special responsibility to provide some kind of training for the retarded children. They make exceptions for the blind and the deaf.

SPAIN

Until recently, families were reluctant to admit that they had handicapped children because they felt it was their fault. Clinical studies in Spain show that women aged 14-18 are most likely to bear defective children. The Lion's Club plays a major role in trying to identify handicapped children and provides funds for ASPEROMANIS, a private school for educable children. The school is operated with financial aid from the government and various groups. The government supplies and pays for teachers who do not stay more than two or three years.

There is a coalition of bankers, businessmen and college professors who meet on a weekly basis to determine ways to raise money to help the handicapped get an education. Since the compulsory education laws are not enforced on a regular basis, it is assumed that physically handicapped students do not go to school if it creates a

problem for them. The coalition did say that if such students do want to go to the university (about .05% do), they encounter no problems with academics or peers. There are no funds available for special services, no training programs for teachers of the disabled and most university buildings are not accessible. Members of the Ministry of Education were unaware of any students in wheelchairs or on crutches attending universities, but they are now taking a look at the problem.

POLAND

There are three universities within Poland to train teachers to work with handicapped students. The School for the Blind has one of the largest Braille libraries in Europe, and there are special churches where only sign language is used. A massive strike by Solidarity was taking place during my visit making movement around the Warsaw area very difficult. Members of the Ministry of Education stated that their current concern was for the safety of all students during the turbulent times.

BULGARIA

It was extremely difficult to get the Bulgarians to stick to the subject of higher education for the handicapped. It was also the only country I had ever been in where there appeared to be no curb cuts and no handicap symbols. It was emphasized that the higher education system was very equitable; that anyone (handicapped or not) who can pass the very strict certification exams for entrance to the university will be admitted. However, handicapped students

have often had some delayed education making it difficult for them to compete. It is important to note that government planning determines the country's need and the type of higher education that will be allowed.

HUNGARY

The faculty of Law and Political Science at the University of Budapest expressed some suprise that a democratic country like the United States would need laws and regulations to protect the handicapped. The Law School building is accessible, has an elevator and large rooms to accommodate the disabled. There are hearing and visually impaired students as well as those in wheelchairs attending classes. There are no totally deaf students. Handicapped students come in the afternoon because they work in the daytime. They attend classes three times a week from 4 - 8 P.M.

BARBADOS

Like other higher education systems around the world, the one in Barbados is very hard pressed for money. The educational system works very closely with the medical profession in determing the extent and type of education students can receive, based on their physical and/or mental disabilities. The Ministry of Education stated that there is a mutual exchange program between Barbados, Jamaica and Grenada. Transportation and other factors might make it difficult for handicapped students to study in areas other than those offered by the University of the West Indies/Barbados campus.

REDESIGNING OUR THINKING AND OUR PROGRAMS

Since many American colleges and universities have some handicapped students in attendance and some of the foreign campuses visited are trying to put a support services program in place, the following suggestions can prove helpful.

1. Provide a forum such as the REACH (Right to Educational Access for Citizens with Handicaps) Committee at Worcester State College so that disabled students can get together to share mutual interests and problems and have social contact. This type of group can be more effective when it includes non-disabled students, faculty, administrators and staff.

2. Conduct workshops and programs for faculty, staff and students so that they can become aware of the need to be more sensitive to and cognizant of the educational, psychological and emotional needs of handicapped students. In addition, the local community both handicapped and non-handicapped should be invited to participate in the programs as speakers and resource people. Using this method helps to enlarge and involve the total community in the efforts of the college and topics for programs are endless.

3. Develop courses and seminars that will not only teach faculty and students how to become more attuned to the needs of handicapped students, but also prepare the students to teach others and become advocates for improved services for the handicapped. Make a strong effort to have these courses become a regular part of the college curriculum.

4. Encourage the college administration to include a line item in the budget to provide services for the handicapped----- tutors, notetakers, transportation between classes and to nearby campuses where they may interact with other handicapped students.

5. Make college administrators and faculty aware of the fact that handicapped students represent another avenue for recruitment, and if they are provided with necessary supportive services, their retention rate could prove to be more stable than any other college age population, i.e., their will to succeed, their will to show their non-handicapped peers and instructors that they can succeed and their desire to serve as role models for other handicapped students who may be hesitant and somewhat fearful about entering the arena of higher education.

6. Develop a Handicap Resource Center that can provide information about the various types of disabilities. Many agencies distribute free materials for the asking. Include video tapes and films that can be used as both teaching and learning tools.

7. Develop a local network with other professionals in the field to provide each other with new information and technical and psychological support. The network can be used to broaden your support base on your own campus as well as to increase your knowledge of what is in, what is out and what has changed in terms of legislation and technology.

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

The quest for information about higher education for the

handicapped on a global level, proved to be much more of a task than anticipated. Semester breaks, vacation schedules and other factors affecting the people to be contacted in this country provided a real challenge as did political turmoil, airline changes and skyrocketing prices for visits abroad.

The overall result of the many contacts made was that there is a deep concern for the education of the handicapped whether the approach is through professional or technical training.